

**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE DONARUMA SUBMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS AND HIGHER EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON FEBRUARY 15, 2017**

***H.B. No. 7027 - An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending
June 30, 2019 Making Appropriations Therefor.***

Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Committee,

I participated in the Connecticut Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network AmeriCorps Program where I served as a full-time AmeriCorps member at Central CT AHEC. Myself, along with 14 other national service members, engaged disadvantaged college and high school students in service learning projects directly benefitting communities across the state. Since 2012, AmeriCorps members serving at the CT AHEC Network and the high school and college students we engage have provided 142,000 hours of service with a total monetary value of \$3,770,000. <http://health360.org/ameriacorps.html>

During my service year I experienced first-hand what a valuable resource the CT AHEC Network is to Connecticut preparing today's students to be ready to meet the challenges of Connecticut's transforming health care environment and patient/community needs. AHEC provides critical training and exposure to vulnerable and underserved patient populations through impactful community based programs including the CT AHEC AmeriCorps program I participated in. The CT AHEC Network AmeriCorps program provides on-going community service outreach activities that promote better health in Connecticut's neediest communities.

I spent a year serving as an AmeriCorps member at Central CT AHEC after graduating from college. My term of service there had a huge impact on my decision to pursue a career as a nurse practitioner and in the future I plan to practice in an underserved community. In addition, I saw firsthand the impact that the Youth Health Service Corps and Collegiate Health Service Corps programs had on the youth I worked with. They became more confident and grew in their understanding of critical issues like health disparities in their communities. AHEC does incredibly important work!

Maintaining CT AHEC Program funding is an important investment for the residents and communities in Connecticut. These dollars are instrumental in the training of health professions students, public health and health professionals, and promoting better health for Connecticut residents.

The 4 regional CT AHEC Centers, in collaboration with the CT AHEC Program Office, extend UConn Health's reach state-wide. Funded since 1997, the CT AHEC Network provides state-wide services to more than 10,000 residents, annually (<http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/ct-ahec.html>). The CT AHEC Network responds to local community health needs which include oral health, mental health, youth and adult mental health first aid, health literacy, homeless and migrant farm worker access to health care. As the demographics of the state continue to change, the primary care workforce must expand and respond to meet those changes: the CT AHEC Network is an invaluable resources to address these challenges.

The CT AHEC Network utilizes federal, state and private funds to support:

- Inter-professional education and community based training for health professions students
- Promotion and retention of primary care providers in collaboration with state agencies
- Mental health training for community members, health profession students and health professionals
- Cultural competence and medical interpreting training to health professionals
- Continuing medical education programs for public health and health care professionals
- Leadership for the State Innovation Model Community Health Workforce Development & Integration to develop the Community Health Worker workforce in Connecticut. <http://www.healthreform.ct.gov/ohri/site/default.asp>
- Pipeline educational programs to raise awareness of health careers for pre-health professions learners including the Health Occupations and Technology Careers in Connecticut (HOT Guide) which provides residents with an invaluable resource to learn about health and biotechnology careers in the state

(www.healthcareersinct.com).

CT AHEC Network's work is vital to maintain access to quality health care for all of Connecticut's citizens. It is my opinion that it would be detrimental to vulnerable communities across Connecticut if Central CT AHEC and the entire CT AHEC Network is not supported with state funding.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. Below is my contact information for your convenience.

Sincerely,
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